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East bloc truckers are accused of spying

Associated Press

HAMBURG, West Germany — More than 300,000 Soviet bloc truck drivers who make runs into the West every year spy on NATO maneuvers and military installations, according to the weekly magazine Stern.

The article, "The Scouts," was accompanied by photographs of a Bulgarian truck halted yards from NATO tanks on maneuvers. The truck's hood was up, and Stern said the driver had faked a mechanical breakdown.

The article also included a two-day account of a Stern reporter tailing an East German heavy truck taking a circuitous journey through a small area of northern West Germany.

Stern said the truckers spy on NATO barrack areas and munitions dumps, test the sturdiness of streets and bridges, measure the depths of rivers, check sizes of railroad stations and observe airport antennas.

Much of the snooping focuses on West Germany because planners of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact believe it would be NATO's front line in an East-West conflict, Stern said.

Border controls for truckers enter-

ing West Germany from the Soviet bloc are limited to checking documents and the vehicles' roadworthiness because the government "does not want to endanger East bloc trade and fears political retaliation" if it did, according to Stern.

A secretary at the West German Interior Ministry, which oversees national security, said spokesmen were not available for comment.

Stern said cargos of Warsaw Pact trucks entering West Germany at the key border post of Helmstedt have not been inspected since 1982, when time-consuming checks elicited a strong protest.

West Germany's Economics Ministry responded by ordering that "on no grounds should overland trade be disrupted," Stern said.

It quoted Guenther Guse, customs chief in Helmstedt, as saying: "We carry out checks only on compelling suspicion of customs violations."

Once inside West Germany, East bloc truckers can roam at will, Stern said, and East German truckers can stay as long as they want because East Germans are not considered foreigners under West German law.